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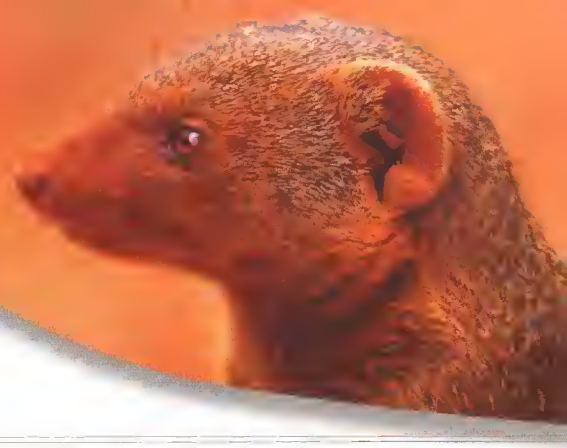

nature net
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Dec 2017 - Jan 2018

The Critically Endangered White-backed vulture in flight. Vultures are the biggest casualties of wildlife poisoning in Kenya. PHOTO: M. VIRANI

New guidelines for responding to wildlife poisoning incidents developed

By P. Gacheru

The guidelines seek to enhance the ability of communities and other wildlife conservation stakeholders to respond to poisoning incidents, particularly outside protected areas.

The rapid decline of vultures in Kenya is a serious concern that requires a concerted approach to reverse the trend. Although vultures are caricatured as greedy and selfish, in reality they keep our environment clean by feeding on dead animals. Four out of the eight vulture species found in Kenya are now classified as Critically Endangered (White-headed, Hooded, White-backed and Rüppell's vultures) while two (Lappet-faced and Egyptian vultures) are listed as Endangered. Poisoning is the leading cause of vulture deaths in the country.

To counter this grim outlook for vultures, Nature Kenya, BirdLife International, The Peregrine Fund and other conservation stakeholders have been championing the protection of vultures through various efforts. One such effort is the development of guidelines on how to respond to incidents of wildlife poisoning. Over the past two years, the three organizations have been working to support Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) to develop the guidelines contained in the wildlife poisoning response protocol.

Vultures are usually poisoned when predators kill livestock and herders poison the carcass to kill the predators. Poachers also target vultures with poison. Most wildlife poisoning incidents take place outside protected areas and in remote areas of the country. Thus the protocol is to enable relevant stakeholders to support wildlife conservation in areas where KWS has limited presence. Local communities will help facilitate the implementation and enforcement of the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act.

Timely response to poisoning incidents can significantly reduce resultant wildlife deaths and environmental contamination. The main species targeted for poisoning are carnivores – lions, hyenas and leopards – which kill livestock. Vultures are mainly unintended victims of these poisoning events. Collaborating with conservation institutions that carry out carnivore conservation was critical, for they play a vital role in ensuring the survival of vultures.

The wildlife poisoning response protocol was presented to stakeholders at the 11th Carnivore Research and Conservation Conference convened by KWS in November 2017. The conference brought together various research institutions, conservation NGOs, local communities and researchers from across the country to present research findings and reports that seek to enhance effective conservation and management of wildlife in the country.

Participants were guided through key components of the protocol. These included: how to recognize a poisoned animal, channels for reporting poisoning incidents, precautions needed to reduce further wildlife deaths, and sample collection, analysis and prosecution procedures. One key concern raised by participants was the lack of feedback on postmortem results to stakeholders, especially on suspected poisonous substances found in the samples. This is important to guide those in the field to enhance mitigation measures when dealing with issues of wildlife poisoning.

Following the publication of the protocol, training on how to apply the protocol will be done. Development of the protocol was made possible through support provided by Fondation Segre and BAND Foundation under the 'Save the African Vulture' project.

Four Critically Endangered vultures found in Kenya now on highest protection list

Several species of vultures, including four Critically Endangered species found in Kenya, have been awarded the highest protection by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals CMS). The four Critically Endangered vulture species that are set to get collaborative international protection are the White-backed, White-headed, Hooded, and Rüppell's vultures. They are faced with threats such as poisoning, hunting, collision with electricity cables and habitat degradation.

Restoring the Mount Kenya Water Tower

By N. Kiboi

The 'Kijani Team' of Kenya Breweries Limited (KBL) joined Hombe and Kabaru Community Forest Associations (CFAs) and Nature Kenya staff in planting tree seedlings as part of the Mt. Kenya Forest restoration initiative last month. Two thousand tree seedlings were planted. So far the two CFAs, with support from KBL, have planted 47,000 indigenous tree seedlings during the ongoing short-rains season. Their target is to plant 100,000 tree seedlings to cover 250 Ha of degraded forest. The CFAs will take care of the tree seedlings for the next three years.

KBL has further supported CFAs around Mt. Kenya with seeds and tree nursery implements. The donations will help the CFAs establish tree nurseries to raise over one million tree seedlings for future tree planting exercises.

The Mt. Kenya Forest restoration initiative targets to raise Ksh. 140 million annually from downstream water users including businesses, hydropower producers, crop farmers and water transfer companies as payment for the forest's ecosystem services. Funds raised will be used to plant 2 million trees to restore 2,000 Ha of Mt. Kenya and the upper Tana catchment landscapes.

In March this year KBL donated Ksh. 8 million towards the Mt. Kenya Forest restoration initiative.

TOP: Members of the "Kijani Team" participating in the tree planting exercise. **LEFT:** Handing over of tree nursery implements to Hombe Community Forest Association members.

PHOTOS: N. KIBOI

January 2018 Waterbird Counts: Calling all Volunteers

Nature Kenya, the Ornithology Section of the National Museums of Kenya and Kenya Wildlife Service invite volunteers to participate in the 2018 African waterbird counts. Register by filling a Volunteer Registration Form, available from the Ornithology Section or by e-mail from: **Oliver Nasirwa <onasirwa@museums.or.ke>**

Volunteers with bird identification and waterbird counting experience or with 4WD vehicles will be given priority. Meals will be provided and we will be sleeping in tents.

Provisional Schedule:

Lake Bogoria	Jan 5 – 6
Lake Nakuru	Jan 7
Lake Elmenteita	Jan 12 – 13
Lake Naivasha	Jan 14
Lake Ol Bolossat	Jan 20 – 21
Lake Magadi	Jan 27 – 28

Nairobi and environs (to be conducted during Wednesday birdwalks and Sunday Birdwatch)

Limuru/Manguo	Jan 3
Paradise Lost / Gigiri	Jan 10
Nairobi National Park/ Lang'ata wetlands	Jan 17
Thika Sewage ponds	Jan 21
Dandora Sewage Works	Jan 24
Kenyatta University, Sukari Dam	Jan 31

For updates go to
www.naturekenya.org

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PHOTOS: P. Usher

- NOTICE TO MEMBERS -

December-January Skies

By F. Ng'weno

Moon Dec 17–Jan 18
Three "supermoons" – a little closer and brighter than usual: Dec 3, Jan 2 and Jan 31. Dec 10: last quarter. Dec 18: new moon; look for a crescent over the sunset on 19th. Dec 26: first quarter.

Jan 2: full moon. Jan 8: last quarter. Jan 17: new moon. Jan 24: first quarter. Jan 31: full moon, also called a "blue moon" as it is the second full moon in a month.

Meteor showers
Meteors are bits of dust and rock from space that burn up when they fall in the Earth's atmosphere. They are best seen after midnight, on nights when the sky is clear and dark. The Geminid meteor shower runs from Dec 7 to 17, peaking Dec 13-14.

Planets Dec 17-Jan 18
Saturn and Mercury are low over the sunset in early December. They pass each other on Dec 6, and Mercury soon sinks below the horizon. Saturn sets after mid-month. Venus is out of sight, but reappears in the sunset glare in late January.

The other bright planets are in the eastern sky before dawn. The moon is near Mars on Dec 13, near Jupiter on the 14th. As Dec ends and the new year begins, Jupiter and Mars seem to draw closer together. They pass each other on Jan 6-7; the moon is near them on Jan 11. Saturn and Mercury are now below them in the eastern sky before dawn. They pass each other on Jan 12-13 and the waning crescent moon joins them on Jan 14-15.

Dec-Jan Stars
The Pleiades, a group of about six bright stars close together, are in the northeast in December. If you look at the Pleiades through binoculars, you will see many more stars in the group, surrounded by a glowing haze. To the left of the Pleiades, low in the north, is the constellation of Cassiopeia, shaped like a letter M.

To the right of the Pleiades, in the east, is the reddish star Aldebaran. Starting from Aldebaran, can you see several fainter stars making a shape like a cone? This is the Hyades cluster, also worth a look through binoculars. It's safe to look at the stars through binoculars, as they are so far away.

Below Aldebaran, in the northeast, is the constellation of Auriga, the Charioteer, shaped like a pentagon. The star Capella is the brightest corner of the pentagon.

Beyond Aldebaran, in the east, the constellation of Orion – the Hunter or Warrior – is rising. In January it will be prominent in the eastern sky. Look for three bright stars in a row, with four bright stars like the corners of a box around them. The highest of these four stars is Rigel, blue-green in colour.

On the other side of Orion, in the south, are the two brightest stars in the night sky: Sirius, the Dog Star, following Orion; and Canopus, the second brightest, lower in the south.

In December the star Achernar is still very bright, low in the southwest. Below Archernar, look for the Small and Large Magellanic Clouds. These fuzzy, hazy spots like small rounds clouds are galaxies. They are made of millions of stars.

Visitor from outside the solar system
For the first time ever, astronomers observed an asteroid from interstellar space passing through our solar system in September and October.

For more information see Spaceweather.com or earthsky.org

Nature *Kenya*
Wishes you Happy Holidays

in the FIELD

DECEMBER 2017 AT A GLIMPSE

Dec 2nd	FoCP Nature Walk
Dec 6th	Morning Birdwalk
Dec 9th	FoNA Guided Tree Walk
Dec 13th	Morning Birdwalk
Dec 16th	FoCP Nature Walk
Dec 17th	Sundoy Birdwatch
Dec 20th	Morning Birdwalk
Dec 27th	Morning Birdwalk

JANUARY 2018 AT A GLIMPSE

Jon 3rd	Morning Birdwolk
Jon 6th	FoCP Noture Wolk
Jan 10th	Morning Birdwalk
Jon 13th	FoNA Guided Tree Walk
Jon 17th	Morning Birdwalk
Jan 20th	FoCP Nature Walk
Jan 21st	Sunday Birdwatch
Jan 24th	Morning Birdwalk
Jan 25th	FoNA Film

Bird ringing every Tuesdoy marning (check with Ornithalogy section, National Museums)

Birders Please Note! **The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Museum. Transport is on a self-help basis. The group meets in the courtyard of the Nairobi National Museum, past the entrance to the galleries. We normally return at about 12:30 pm.**

The Sunday Birdwatch on the THIRD Sunday of each month now also meets at 8:30 am, at the same location. It is a day trip; please bring water and lunch.

Mombasa Birdwalks On the 3rd Saturday of each month. For meeting time and place, please contact Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540; or Doris Schaule <dorischaule@gmail.com> / 0722-277752. Or check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Ngang Forest walks - 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 a.m. Contact Simon 0729-840715

FUNDAMENTALS OF ORNITHOLOGY

A Certificate Course for Bird Guides and Birders

Kindly register for the FoO 2018 Course that will take place at

Elsamere Field Study Centre, Naivasha from

15th - 23rd March 2018

Participation fee is KSh 56, 000 for Kenyan citizens and US $680 for residents and foreign participants

For more information send an email to:

foo@naturekenya.org

KENYA'S VULTURES IN DANGER 2018 CALENDAR

Get a free copy of **'Kenya's Vultures in Danger' 2018 calendar** when you either:

- Recruit a new member
- Renew your membership
- Purchase goods worth Ksh 2,000/- from our Nature Kenya shop

Proceeds from sales will go towards saving Kenya's Endangered vulture species

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- Enter the amount, enter your PIN
- Confirm details & press OK

For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org